

NEWS

The Evergreen State College
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THE EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE FACULTY MEMBER TO BE ORDAINED

She wanted to become a minister, but at the time women were only allowed to direct Sunday School programs.

But Linnea Pearson a faculty member of The Evergreen State College, never lost the urge to deal with the "ultimate questions" and her persistence paid off. Come spring, the journalist-turned-college-professor will become the sixth woman to be ordained by the Unitarian-Universalist Church.

Ms. Pearson, who began college at a small Illinois church school, says "Everyone going there wanted to become a minister...but there were no lady ministers then." So, she transferred to the University of Illinois, where she changed her major to journalism, "which was the closest I could come to the ultimate issues of life and death that I wanted to deal with."

She continued her education, earning a master's degree and then a doctorate in literature and heading south to teach at an all black college in Norfolk, Virginia.

There, she says, "I got involved with 'radical' southern politics--like the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union)---and started a women's group which became the first Virginia Chapter of the National Organization of Women."

Her community activities led her to the Unitarian Church, which was one of the political forces in the area. "I began thinking about the way the church could be used for social action and I started to tune into my own religious interests and the ultimate questions we all must deal with," she says.

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Dick Nichols, Director
Information Services

In 1972 she won a fellowship to Harvard University and began work on a master's degree in theology, which she hopes to complete this summer. Her next step was to apply for a ministerial license from the Unitarian-Universalist Association. She passed an extensive oral examination covering theology, religion, social action and the history of the Unitarian Church and delivered a sermon to the Ministerial Fellowship Board of "The Need for Mystery and Celebration Within the Church." Permission for ordination followed shortly thereafter, and the "Ms" became the Reverend.

The Reverend joined Evergreen's staff last fall and began making what she describes as "the sermon circuit." She's made guest sermons at Unitarian Churches in Everett and Seattle and has several more planned for later this year.

Teaching will remain Rev. Pearson's main occupation, but she "may consider" a part-time ministerial appointment in the future.

"The idea of talking with people about religion in some sort of way that's both emotional and intellectual is still very new to me," she admits. "It's a very hard thing to do because you're dealing with the ultimate values in your life. We're so conditioned not to do that...we get embarrassed and want to shy away from it. But," she adds, "we need to find the words to speak about these things...to share thoughts instead of keeping them as private experiences."

Ms. Pearson says talking about one's religious beliefs is almost taboo, like talking about sex or death used to be. "But," she says, "we're learning to talk about the other two and we're starting to talk about God."